

Genesis 21 – Isaac the son of promise, The Birth of Isaac, and *Hagar and Ishmael cast out*

In the preceding chapter, we saw the sin that must be dealt with, confessed, and put away before Isaac could be born to Abraham and Sarah. Now in chapter 21 we have the birth of Isaac.

Gen 21:1-2 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

You will notice that there is a very striking similarity between the birth of Isaac and the birth of Christ. I believe that the birth of Isaac was given to us to set before mankind this great truth before Christ came. Isaac was born at the set time God had promised, and Paul says, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal_4:4). - McGee

Gen 21:3-7 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

There are some very remarkable truths here that we need to lay hold of. First of all, the birth of Isaac was a miraculous birth. It was contrary to nature. In the fourth chapter of Romans, Paul writes that Abraham "... considered not his own body now dead ... neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Rom_4:19). Out of death God brings forth life: this is a miraculous birth. We need to call attention to the fact that God did not flash the supernatural birth of Christ on the world as being something new. He began to prepare men for it, and therefore way back here at the birth of Isaac we have a miraculous birth.

We also find here that God had to deal with both Sarah and Abraham. They had to recognize that they could do nothing, that it would be impossible for them to have a child. Abraham is 100 years old; Sarah is 90 years old. In other words, the birth of Isaac must be a birth that they really have nothing to do with. – McGee

What is too big for God? Do you have areas of your life that seem dead? Do you believe God can resurrect those areas of your life? Do did you learn from Abraham and Sarah's example on what our part is to Him resurrecting the dead things in our lives?

God Protects Hagar and Ishmael

Gen 21:8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

Isaac was probably from two to five years old when he was weaned. Ishmael would have been between thirteen and seventeen. – Believers Bible Commentary

This little fellow first lived by feeding on his mother's milk, but there came a day when he had to be weaned. Even this has a lesson for us. When mamma is getting the bottle ready for the little baby in the crib, everything in his entire body is working. He's got his feet up in the air, he's got his hands up in the air, and he's yelling at the top of his voice—he wants his bottle! "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1Pe_2:2). It is wonderful to be a new Christian with an appetite like that for the milk of the Word. But the day comes when you are ready to start growing up as a believer. Instead of just reading Psalm 23 and John 14—wonderful as they are—try reading through the entire Bible. Grow up. Don't be a babe all of the time.

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Notice God's admonishment in Heb_5:13-14. "For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age ..." Grow up, friend. – McGee

Milk is good, but the disciple will grow and desire meat – not milk alone! What are you feeding on?

Gen 21:9-10 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac."

The coming of this little boy Isaac into the home sure did produce a great deal of difficulty. We find that the boy who was the son of Hagar, Ishmael, was mocking. We begin now to see the nature and the character of Ishmael. Up to this point, he seems to be a pretty nice boy, but now, with the appearance of this other son in the family, Ishmael really shows his true colors.

This is an illustration, by the way, of the fact that a believer has two natures. Until you are converted, you have an old nature, and that old nature controls you. You do what you want to do. As the old secular song put it, you are "doing what comes naturally." What you do that comes naturally is not always the nicest sort of thing. But when you are born again, you receive a new nature. And when you receive a new nature, that is where the trouble always begins. Paul writes in the seventh chapter of Romans of the battle going on between the old nature and the new nature: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil; which I would not, that I do" (Rom_7:19). That is, the new nature doesn't want to, but the old nature wants to do it, and the old nature is in control. The time comes when you have to make a decision as to which nature you are going to live by. You must make a determination in this matter of yielding to the Lord. You either have to permit the Holy Spirit to move in your life, or else you have to go through life controlled by the flesh. There is no third alternative for the child of God. The son of the bondwoman must be put out. That is exactly what we have here in Genesis: the son of the bondwoman Hagar had to be put out. - McGee

Gen 21:11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son.

After all, as far as the flesh is concerned, Ishmael is Abraham's son just as much as Isaac is. Isaac has just been born, and a little bitty baby doesn't know too much about him yet. But this boy Ishmael has been in the home for a good many years—he's a teen-ager now, and Abraham is attached to him. The thing is very grievous if Abraham is going to have to send him away. Again, I go back to that which we said before: God did not approve of the thing which Sarah and Abraham did, and God cannot accept Ishmael. This is sin. God just did not approve of it, and He doesn't intend to approve of it at all. It was a heartbreak to Abraham, but in order to relieve the embarrassment, he had to send that boy away. Poor Sarah just couldn't take it with this older boy around mocking her.

As a believer you cannot live in harmony with both natures. You are going to have to make a decision. James says, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (Jas_1:8). This explains the instability and the insecurity among many Christians today. They want to go with the world, and yet they want to go with the Lord. They are spiritual schizophrenics, trying to do both—and you cannot do that. The Greeks had a race in which they put two horses together, and the rider would put one foot on one horse and the other foot on the other horse, and the race would start. Well, it was a great race as long as the horses were together. You and I have two natures—one is a black horse, and the other is a white horse. It would be great if they would go together, but they just will not

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work together. The white horse goes one way and the black horse another way. When they do this, you and I have to make up our minds which one we are going with—whether we are going to live by the old nature or the new nature. This is why we are told to yield ourselves: “yield yourselves unto God ... and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom_6:13). Paul goes on to say that what the law could not do through the weakness of the flesh, the Spirit of God can now accomplish (see Rom_8:3-4). The law tried to control man's old nature and failed. Now the Spirit of God, empowering the new nature, can accomplish what the law could never do.

The character of Ishmael, the son of Hagar, begins to be revealed. This is the nature that we find manifested later on in that nation, a nation that is antagonistic and whose hand is against his brother. This has been the picture of him down through the centuries.

In the birth of Isaac, as I have already suggested, we have a foreshadowing of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. God did not suddenly spring the virgin birth on mankind. He had prepared us by several miraculous births before this, including the birth of John the Baptist, the birth even of Samson, and here the birth of Isaac. I would like to call your attention to the remarkable comparison between the births of Isaac and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(1) The birth of Isaac and the birth of Christ had both been promised. When God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees twenty-five years earlier, God had said to him, “I am going to give a son to you and Sarah.” Now twenty-five years have gone by, and God has made good His promise. God also said to the nation Israel, “A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son.” When the day came that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, it was a fulfillment of prophecy. Both births had been promised.

(2) With both births there was a long interval between the promise and the fulfillment. Actually, there were about twenty-five years from the time God promised it until the birth of Isaac. With the birth of Christ, you could go back many generations. For example, God had promised that there would come One in David's line—and that was a thousand years before Christ was born. This is quite a remarkable parallel here.

(3) The announcements of the births seemed incredulous and impossible to Sarah and to Mary. You will recall that the servants of the Lord visited Abraham as they were on the way to Sodom, and they announced the birth of Isaac. It just seemed impossible. Sarah laughed and said, “This thing just can't be. It is beyond belief.” And, after all, who was the first one to raise a question about the virgin birth? It was Mary herself. When the angel made the announcement, she said, “... How shall this be, seeing I now not a man?” (Luk_1:34).

(4) Both Isaac and Jesus were named before their births. Abraham and Sarah were told that they were going to have a son and that they were going to name him Isaac. And with the birth of the Lord Jesus, we find that He was also named beforehand. The angel said to Joseph, “... thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat_1:21).

(5) Both births occurred at God's appointed time. Verse 2 of this chapter says that at the set time which God had spoken to them of, Sarah brought forth Isaac. And regarding the birth of Jesus, we note that Paul says, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal_4:4).

(6) Both births were miraculous. The birth of Isaac was a miraculous birth, and, certainly, the birth of the Lord Jesus was—no man had any part in that.

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(7) Both sons were a particular joy of their fathers. We read that “Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac,” meaning laughter. This was the name he gave his son because back at the time when God made the announcement, he laughed because of his sheer joy in it all. Referring to the Lord Jesus, we read that the Father spoke out of heaven and said, “... This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat_3:17). Both sons were a joy.

(8) Both sons were obedient to their fathers, even unto death. In chapter 22 we are going to see that this boy Isaac was offered up by his father. He was not a small boy of eight or nine years. Isaac just happened to be about thirty–three years old when this took place, and he was obedient to his father even unto death. That was true of Isaac, and that was certainly true of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a marvelous picture of the birth and life of Christ in the birth and life of Isaac.

(9) Finally, the miraculous birth of Isaac is a picture of the resurrection of Christ. We have already noted Paul's words that Abraham “considered not his own body now dead ... neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb” (Rom_4:19). Out of death came life—that's resurrection, you see. After Paul emphasizes this, he goes on to say of the Lord Jesus, “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom_4:25). We have in Isaac quite a remarkable picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we find how God graciously deals with Abraham and also with Hagar and her son Ishmael. - McGee

Gen 21:12-13 But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."

God makes it clear to Abraham that He is not going to accept Ishmael as the son He had promised. God had said, “Of thy seed, I will make nations to come from you,” and therefore He now says that a great nation will come from this boy Ishmael also. - McGee

Gen 21:14-16 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept.

When Hagar and the boy almost perished from thirst in the desert south of Canaan, God caused them to find a well, and they were spared. Ishmael was in his teens at this time; therefore, verse 15 probably means that Hagar pushed him under one of the shrubs in his weakness. - Believers Bible Commentary

Gen 21:17-21 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Ishmael's name, "God hears," is found twice in verse 17—“God heard” and “God has heard.” Children and young people should be encouraged to pray. God hears and answers! – Believers Bible Commentary

Why does Hagar not hear God? What is keeping you from hearing God?